# MARINE MAMMAL SIGHTING FORM

Platforms of Opportunity Program

Marine mammal sighting data help us determine the distribution and behaviors of marine mammals throughout the world. Sightings data that you will collect are integrated into the National Marine Mammal Laboratory's Platforms of Opportunity database, which has data dating back to 1958.

Please record every species of marine mammal that you encounter. Use the field guides we've provided to assist you in making identifications. Don't worry if you are unable to positively identify an animal, as long as you give a complete description of all the sighting cues you were able to pick up.

Please fully describe any species you encounter for the first time each cruise, writing detailed notes and sketches. For subsequent sightings of frequently encountered species, a brief description is all that is necessary. However, if the sighting involves unusual behaviors, documents a fishery interaction or warrants some extra description (e.g., mating humpback whales), please write it up fully. The more information, the better the data. The attached instructions explain how to complete the sighting form.

For more information on the Platforms of Opportunity program, contact Sally Mizroch at the National Marine Mammal Laboratory, NOAA/NMFS/AFSC/NMML, 7600 Sand Point Way NE, Seattle, WA 98115, e-mail: Sally.Mizroch@noaa.gov. Tel: (206) 526-4030.

## SIGHTING FORM INSTRUCTIONS

**NOTE: DO NOT FILL IN SHADED BOXES.**

1. **OBSERVER**: Write your name here.

2: **VESSEL**: Write the vessel name here.

**3. DATE** (1 - 6): Enter year (e.g., 98), month and day, in that order.

4. **TIME** (7 - 10): Time of sighting is logged when the animal is first seen. Use local time. If you know the Greenwich Mean Time offset, put it in boxes 11 - 13.

5. **LATITUDE** (14 - 19): Record the latitude to tenths of minutes, if possible.

6. **LONGITUDE** (20 - 26): Record longitude to tenths of minutes, if possible.

7. **GENERAL LOCATION**: Write the general area or location you are in, e.g, Prince William Sound. This is optional but is appreciated.

8. **SIGHTING CONDITIONS**: Give a qualitative evaluation of the overall sighting conditions. Excellent: Unlimited visibility, flat seas. Good: Sighting conditions affected somewhat by glare, sea state or weather. Fair: Sighting conditions affected by a combination of problems, e.g, heavy seas or poor weather. Poor: Severely limited visibility due to high seas or poor weather.

9. **BEAUFORT** (27): Use the scale of sea and wind conditions (listed on the back page of the form) to choose the Beaufort scale number that best describes the conditions during your sighting. (Note: Although the Beaufort scale actually goes up through 10 - storm, 11 - violent storm, and 12 - hurricane, these codes are not appropriate for sightings.)

10. **SURFACE WATER TEMPERATURE** (28 - 31): Record the temperature in degrees Centigrade rounded off to the nearest tenth of a degree. If below freezing, place a "-" in box 28. If above freezing, place "+" in box 28. The surface water temperature can be obtained by the ship's engineer from the engine inlet thermometer. The conversion from Fahrenheit to Centigrade is: $C° = 5/9(F° - 32)$.

11. **SPECIES**: Write in either the common or scientific name of the marine mammal. Make sure you indicate your level of confidence in your species identification in the boxes to the right of the species section. Please give a very detailed description of the characteristics you observed. It is very important that you list all of the characteristics that led you to an identification of the marine mammal. See below for a list of important things to make notes on. If two or more species are sighted at the same time, note the association (if any) in the comments section, check the box for a multiple species sighting near the bottom of the page and make sure you fill out a separate sighting form for each species. If you cannot determine a species, enter as "unident. large whale", "unident. porpoise", etc. Remember that an erroneous identification is worse than none at all.

13. **SIGHTING CUE**: Write in the sighting cue that first made you notice the marine mammal (e.g., blow, dorsal fin, body, breach, etc.)

14. **CLOSEST APPROACH** (32 - 35): Note distance in meters of the closest approach of the marine mammal.

13. **NUMBER SIGHTED** (36 - 47): Give a best estimate of number of individual animals here. If unable to count all the animals with certainty, estimate the number seen in terms of a range (e.g., Best estimate: 15, Minimum present: 12, Maximum present: 20). For Dall's porpoise, note if you see more rooster tails than the actual number of animals that come to the boat.

## NARRATIVE AND SKETCHES

These sections are very important parts of the observation. **Remember, if you positively identify the species, tell us the characteristics you used to confirm the sighting**. Everything that you observed about the animal to identify it should be detailed. Be liberal with sketches and draw only what you see, not what the field guide shows. We always appreciate (and enjoy) seeing sketches and reading detailed narratives when editing the data forms.

Important things to look for and take notes on when identifying are:

Color pattern on fins and body Does the color pattern on the fins or body include stripes, spots, patches or mottling? Or is it uniform color?

Length Size is difficult to estimate at sea, so if it is convenient, compare unfamiliar animals with a species with which you are familiar. For example--"about size of female Steller sea lion" or "slightly smaller than adult male killer whale."

Shape and size of dorsal fin and its position on the body It may also be important to note if there was not a dorsal fin present. If possible, also note size and shape of tail and flippers.

General shape of body Is the general shape of the body slender or robust?

Shape and size of snout Is it long, short, blunt or pointed? What is its estimated length in inches? Is there a definite break between snout and forehead? Is the forehead markedly bulbous?

Shape, location, and direction of blow Is the blow V-shaped or not? Where is the blowhole located? Does the blow project forward or go straight up?

Scars and scratch marks Are there scars or scratch marks visible on the animal?

Check off the Body Length Estimate, and circle any Behaviors Seen or Fishing Interactions. Note here if you've taken any Photos or Video that may be helpful for species identification or photo-identification for species including killer whales, humpback whales, or blue whales. On the back of the form are back, blow and head profiles of many marine mammals. Circle those which most closely resemble what you observed.

Be generous with your narrative of animal's behavior. If there are several animals, are they in a tight school, a loose school, or scattered either singly or in small groups? Describe their diving behavior. How many times do they blow when they come to the surface? Do they raise their tail flukes when they dive after their last blow? How long do they stay down between each series of blows? Do they jump (breach) clear of the water? If so, do they jump in a smooth arc or do they sometimes belly-flop, somersault, or spin? Were the marine mammals attracted to the ship by the net retrieval? Were they feeding off discarded fish and fish parts?

Last, but not least, this form is slightly revised from the 1997 field season. Please write comments and suggestions directly on the form to improve the form in future revisions.